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FRED COOPER/NEW YORK

THE AMERICAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATS AT 75

INTRO:

EVERY FOUR YEARS DURING THE PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY SEASON, THE MANY AND DIVERSE ELEMENTS OF THE UNITED STATES' TWO MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES RECEIVE PARTICULAR ATTENTION AS CANDIDATES SEEK TO WIN THEIR PARTY'S PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION. BUT THIS YEAR, ONE PART OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY -- THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS -- WILL BE ATTRACTING A BIT OF ATTENTION ON THEIR OWN, FOR THE ORGANIZATION IS CELEBRATING ITS 75TH ANNIVERSARY. VOA'S FRED COOPER HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT:

TEXT:

THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS TODAY FORM ONE PART OF THE LIBERAL WING OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY. BUT IT WASN'T ALWAYS SO. SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, THE GROUP WAS FOUNDED AS THE SOCIALIST PARTY, U.S.A. UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF EUGENE V. DEBS AND MORRIS HILLQUIT. AND THROUGHOUT THE FIRST HALF OF THIS CENTURY, IT RAN ITS OWN CANDIDATES FOR PRESIDENT. EUGENE DEBS HEADED THE SOCIALIST PARTY TICKET FOUR TIMES, AND IN 1912, RECEIVED THE PARTY'S HIGHEST VOTE TOTAL -- SIX PERCENT OF THE POPULAR VOTE.

IN THE EARLY 1900'S THE SOCIALISTS COULD ALSO BOAST OF LOCAL OFFICE-HOLDERS IN THREE HUNDRED FORTY CITIES AROUND THE NATION.

OVER THE YEARS, AMERICAN SOCIALIST PARTY MEMBERS HAVE PLAYED LEADING ROLES IN THE TRADE UNION AND CIVIL RIGHTS

MOVEMENTS. SOCIALISTS HELPED FOUND THE AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERITIES UNION. THEY ALSO SPOKE OUT IN FAVOR OF SOCIAL WELFARE PROGRAMS, THE MINIMUM WAGE, PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMS AND UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE. NORMAL THOMAS, WHO SUCCEEDED EUGENE DEBS AS SOCIALIST LEADER AND WHO RAN FOR PRESIDENT SIX TIMES, BETWEEN 1928 AND 1948, WAS ATTACKED REPEATEDLY BY PEOPLE FROM BOTH MAJOR PARTIES FOR HIS "RADICAL" IDEAS. HOWEVER, MANY OF HIS PROPOSALS WERE LATER ADOPTED BY THE DEMOCRATS DURING THE ADMINISTRATION OF PRESIDENT FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT.

IN 1936, THE SOCIALIST PARTY SPLIT, WITH MANY MEMBERS BREAKING OFF TO FORM THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC FEDERATION. THE FEDERATION SUPPORTED PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT WHILE THE SOCIALIST PARTY CONTINUED TO RUN CANDIDATES. ONLY RECENTLY HAS THE MOVEMENT JOINED FORCE AGAIN. AT ITS 1968 NATIONAL CONVENTION, THE SOCIALIST PARTY FORMALLY ABANDONED INDEPENDENT ELECTORAL ACTIVITY, IN FAVOR OF A PROGRAM CALLING FOR A BROAD COALITION OF LABOR, MINORITIES AND LIBERALS TO BRING ABOUT ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHANGES. AND FOUR YEARS LATER, THE DIVISION IN THE AMERICAN SOCIALIST MOVEMENT WAS HEALED WHEN THE TWO BRANCHES REUNITED UNDER THE LABEL, SOCIAL DEMOCRATS, U.S.A.

TODAY'S SOCIAL DEMOCRATS ARE STILL STRONGLY ALIGNED WITH AMERICAN TRADE UNIONS. THE ORGANIZATION BELIEVES THAT THE LABOR MOVEMENT IS THE SINGLE MOST POWERFUL AND REPRESENTATIVE FORCE FOR SOCIAL PROGRESS IN THE UNITED STATES.

RATHER THAN FIELDING CANDIDATES OF THEIR OWN, THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS HAVE DECIDED TO WORK WITHIN THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY, WHICH THEY CALL THE PARTY OF TRADE UNIONISTS, MINORITIES, LIBERALS AND YOUTH. NEVERTHELESS, SOCIAL DEMOCRATS, U.S.A. RETAINS ITS SEPARATE IDENTITY AS THE AMERICAN MEMBER PARTY OF THE SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL -- THE WORLD SOCIALIST MOVEMENT WHICH INCLUDES SUCH ORGANIZATIONS AS THE BRITISH LABOR PARTY, THE SWEDISH SOCIAL DEMOCRATS, THE FRENCH SOCIALIST PARTY AND THE ITALIAN SOCIALISTS AND SOCIALIST WORKERS.

AT SEVENTY-FIVE, THE AMERICAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATS RATE THEIR INFLUENCE ON U-S POLITICS, PERHAPS AS GREAT AS ITS EVER BEEN. AND THEY VIEW THE CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL CLIMATE AS PROVIDING THE POSSIBILITY FOR EVEN GREATER INFLUENCE IN THE FUTURE.

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